

Intersection Safety Design Decisions

BACKGROUND: Intersections are among the most dangerous and complex traffic features that drivers encounter. According to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration data, 21 percent of all traffic fatalities and roughly 50 percent of serious traffic injuries can be attributed to intersections. Roundabouts almost completely eliminate fatalities and significantly reduce injury crashes.

A 2015 safety study produced by the University of Wisconsin Traffic Operations and Safety (TOPS) Lab showed that fatal and severe injury crashes decreased by 40 percent at Wisconsin roundabouts. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety found roundabouts are safer for two main reasons:

- Less potential for serious crashes (head-on and T-bone collisions are eliminated)
- Low travel speeds (less severe crashes result from lower travel speeds)

Roundabouts, however, are not always the most appropriate intersection design. There are a number of factors that should be considered when deciding whether or not a roundabout is the best options for traffic control at an intersection. Crash rates, traffic volume, geometry, land acquisition costs, environmental concerns, traffic delays, constructability and public feedback are some of the many things that need to be taken into consideration when government agencies are designing intersection improvements.

Public sentiment regarding roundabouts has changed over time. Research has shown that the number of people who favor roundabouts more than doubles as they gain experience with them. A survey by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety showed that before construction, the number of drivers in favor of roundabouts was only 31 percent and those strongly opposed was 41 percent. Follow-up surveys after roundabout installation showed those in favor increased to 63 percent and those strongly opposed dropped to just 15 percent.

POSITION STATEMENT: Some members of the Wisconsin Legislature have proposed requiring Counties or the State of Wisconsin seek approval of the municipality where the proposed roundabout is located. While seeking public input is an integral part of the intersection design process, it cannot be the only factor considered.

Ultimately it is the County or the State of Wisconsin that are responsible for any liabilities resulting from intersection design, maintenance and for funding those improvements under their jurisdiction. It is not appropriate to make safety decisions based solely on political whims.

REQUESTED ACTION: The WCHA opposes any legislative effort that that would allow one unit of government veto authority over safety improvements on another unit of government's roadway or intersection design.